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The present invention relates to automobile seat covers, and more particularly to automobile seat covers capable of fitting a variety of automobile seat configurations.

Automobile seats, in particular so-called bucket style or bucket-type seats, typically come in two general designs: high-back and low-back seats. Low back seats generally have a back portion terminating at or about the shoulder level of a seat occupant, whereas high-back seats, as the name implies, have back portions that extend higher than the back portions of low-back seats. It is also generally the case that the uppermost back portion of high-back seats generally narrows relative to the lower portion.

These different styles have necessarily led to the manufacture of automobile seat covers of different configurations that correspond to each style. Efforts to devise so-called universal-fit seat covers, i.e., covers that can fit both low-back and high-back seats, have employed synthetic elastic or stretchable materials. Examples of such seat covers are disclosed in, for example, U.S. Patent No 4,958,886. However, natural materials, and, in particular, animal hides such as sheepskin remain very popular for automobile seat covers, for both comfort and aesthetic reasons. Because sheepskin is non-elastic or non-stretchable, it has typically been necessary for manufacturers and retailers to design, manufacture and stock at least two versions of sheepskin seat covers, i.e., high-back and low-back versions. Attempts have been made to design universal seat covers where a portion of the seat cover consists of sheepskin. For example, U.S. Patent No. 4,676,549 discloses a seat cover having a sheepskin panel and a cap portion made of a stretchable material. However, for reasons of comfort, look, and marketability, there remains a need for universal seat covers that employ sheepskin.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention meets these and other needs and is directed to an automobile seat cover capable of being secured over both high-back and low-back automobile seats. In one aspect, the invention provides for an automobile seat cover having a seat portion connected to a back portion. The seat portion is formed of a surface panel and a side panel affixed thereto. The back portion is formed of a forward panel affixed to upper and lower rear panels, the bottom edge of the upper rear panel extending below the top edge of the lower rear panel. The seat cover also includes straps for securing the cover to the seat, as well as maintaining a smooth custom fit appearance when the cover is secured over both low-back and high-back seats. These straps include a plurality of first spaced-apart straps extend from the top edge of the upper rear panel, and one or more second straps extend from the bottom edge of the upper rear panel. The straps can be secured under tension to the seat frame or to other straps originating from the seat portion of the cover in order to maintain the back portion of the seat cover in place.

In an embodiment of the invention, the surface panel of the seat portion and the forward panel of the back portion are formed of an inelastic material, such as an animal hide. In a preferred embodiment, these panels are formed of sheepskin. In another embodiment of the invention, the side and rear panels are formed of an elastic material.

In yet another embodiment, a sleeve containing a drawstring is provided along the top edge of the lower rear panel. A portion of the drawstring extends through the sleeve. By pulling the extended portion and locking it in place against the sleeve, the top edge is placed into and maintained in a constricted condition.

A more complete understanding of the invention will be apparent by reference to the following drawings and description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a bottom view of a seat cover according to one embodiment of the invention showing the underside of the seat cover;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the seat cover of another embodiment of the invention, oriented for mounting onto an automobile seat;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view, with parts broken away, of the seat cover of FIG. 1 mounted onto a high-back automobile seat; and

FIG. 4 is a perspective view, with parts broken away, of the seat cover of FIG. 1 mounted onto a low-back automobile seat.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of seat covers according to the present invention are depicted in FIGS. 1 and 2, respectively. Seat covers 10 and 11, as depicted, both include seat portion 12 and back portion 30. As more clearly shown in FIG. 2, the seat portion is configured to fit over and cover the seat portion of an automobile seat (not shown), and the back portion is configured to fit over and cover the back of an automobile seat, whether it be of the high-back or low-back variety. A plurality of securing straps and hooks are provided for securing the seat cover to the seat, as will be more fully described herein.

Seat portion 12 includes surface panel 14 that is configured to generally correspond to and cover the seat surface of an automobile seat. Side panel 16 is affixed to the front and side edges of upper surface panel 14 and extends downward therefrom. The side panel is thus configured to cover the front and side faces of an automobile seat. The bottom edge of side panel 16 is rimmed with elastic hem 18. The hem serves to gather the bottom portions of the side panel under the seat itself when the seat cover is installed, helping to maintain seat portion 10 in place and providing for a smoother exterior appearance. Front elastic securing straps 20, 21, and 22 having hooks 23, 24 and 25, respectively, extend from the bottom front edge of panel 16. Similarly, side elastic securing straps 26 and 27 having hooks 28 and 29, respectively, extend from either side edge of panel 16. The straps and hooks are used to more firmly secure seat portion 12 to the automobile seat by securing the straps under

tension. This can be accomplished, for example, by securing the hooks to the underside frame of the automobile seat or by securing the hooks of opposing straps.

Back portion 30 includes forward panel 32 and upper and lower rear panels 34, 40. Upper rear panel 34 is affixed to upper and side edges of forward panel 32 along top edge 35 and side edges 37, 38 of the upper rear panel. Lower rear panel 40 is affixed to side edges of forward panel 32 along side edges 43, 44 of the lower rear panel. Lower rear panel 40 is positioned such that an upper region of the lower rear panel overlaps a lower region of upper rear panel 34. That is, bottom edge 36 of upper rear panel 34 extends below top edge 41 of lower rear panel 40. Elastic hem 31 is secured along the bottom edge 42 of lower rear panel 40 and serves to gather material at the bottom edge for a smooth appearance.

Back portion 30 is attached to seat portion 12. Specifically, the bottom edge of forward panel 32 of the back portion is affixed to the rear edge of upper surface panel 14 of the seat portion. Elastic center securing straps 60 and 61 having hooks 62 and 63, respectively, extend from the junction of forward panel 32 and surface panel 14. When the seat cover is applied to a seat, these straps can be fed through the space between the seat back and the seat itself, and then secured to the seat frame or to other straps originating from the seat cover.

Panels 14 and 32 are formed of an inelastic, non-stretchable material. Suitable inelastic materials include those woven or knit from synthetic or natural fibers, and others such as animal hides, e.g., sheepskin or leather. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the inelastic material is a sheepskin. Panels 16, 34 and 40 can be formed of any suitable material, including synthetic and non-synthetic materials, although it is preferred that they have some elasticity. For aesthetic reasons, it is preferable that materials of panels 14 and 32, and panels 16, 34 and 40 are of a similar texture. For example, where surface and forward panels 14 and 32 are formed of sheepskin, rear panels 34 and 40 can be formed of a stretchable synthetic fur material chosen to match the sheepskin in color and texture, thereby giving a pleasing overall appearance to

Sleeve **50** extends along top edge **41** of lower rear panel **40**. Drawstring **46** extends through the sleeve, and is secured at either end at or near side edges **43, 44**. A portion of the drawstring extends from the sleeve. By pulling on this extended portion of the drawstring, top edge **41** of lower rear panel **40** can be constricted. Barrel lock **52** is disposed on the extending portion and can be employed to lock the drawstring in place and maintain top edge **41** in a constricted condition.

Seat cover 11 of FIG. 2 has the added feature of storage pocket 45 formed between the overlapping portions of upper and lower rear panels 34 and 40. As depicted, pocket lining 48 extends from bottom edge 36 of upper rear panel 34 and connects to top edge 41 of lower rear panel 40 to form the storage pocket. The pocket lining can be formed of a variety of suitable materials. The configuration and depth of the pocket can be altered by changing the shape and size of the pocket lining. It will be appreciated that a storage pocket can also be created by securing the pocket lining at locations along lower rear panel 40 but below top edge 41.

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As more clearly shown in FIG. 3, in the case of installation over a high-back seat, the seat back itself will essentially fill back portion 30. The elasticity of rear panels 34 and 40 provide for a snug fit and smooth appearance. By tightening drawstring 46 and securing it with barrel lock 52, the back portion can be even more tightly cinched onto the seat back. Tightening drawstring 46 also serves to close off the opening to storage pocket 45 in the embodiment of FIG. 2. The barrel lock and excess portion of the drawstring extending from sleeve 50 can be tucked behind panel 40.

FIG. 4 shows cover 10 secured over a low-back seat. As seen, securing straps 54 and 56 impart a pulling force on the top of forward panel 32. This pulling force causes the top portion of panel 32 to be drawn over the top and upper back portion of the seat itself. The result is that the forward-facing panel 32 retains a smooth-fitting appearance over the front portion of the seat back. At the same time, securing strap 55 also imparts a pulling force on upper rear panel 34. This results in a taking up of slack in rear panel 34 created when the top of forward panel 32 is drawn over the seat top by straps 54 and 56. Further, the elastic nature of panel 34 also takes up additional slack in the panel. Any additional excessive gathering or bunching of the material of panel 34 can be manually pushed behind the top region of lower panel 40. Again, by tightening drawstring 46 and securing it with barrel lock 52, the entire back portion of the cover can be even more tightly cinched onto the seat back. The end result is that cover maintains a smooth, custom-fit appearance on a low-back seat. It will be appreciated that the design can also accommodate a wide variety of seat sizes ranging between high-back and low-back styles. In any such case, the operation of the straps and the rear panels yield a smooth, custom fit appearance.

Although only certain embodiments have been illustrated and described, those having ordinary skill in the art will understand that the invention is not

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